

## Shall I conceal from Avraham what I am about to do, and Avraham will surely become a great and mighty nation? (17:18)

Hashem's apparent deliberation concerning whether or not to share His plans about the destruction of Sodom with Avraham *Avinu* begs elucidation. The very statement implies that He had a legitimate reason to conceal this information from Avraham. Nonetheless, Hashem decided to share the information with Avraham (regardless). The Patriarch was destined to be the progenitor of a great nation. Thus, he should be made aware of the impending destruction. Obviously, something is happening of which the reader is not aware. *Rashi* explains that this is a rhetorical question, which should be read in astonishment. Nonetheless, it still does not clarify Hashem's reason for not informing Avraham and explain what prompted His ultimate decision to share the information with him.

The **Belzer Rebbe**, *Horav Yehoshua, zl*, gave the following pivotal explanation. I use the word "pivotal," because the *Rebbe* is teaching us a seminal lesson in Torah *hashkafah*, perspective, concerning *tefillah*, prayer. Avraham prayed fervently for the people of Sodom, hoping beyond hope that they would be spared. Despite his supreme efforts, Hashem denied his pleas. Thus, it would make sense to question why Hashem told Avraham about Sodom's impending doom. Apparently, the verdict had been signed, sealed and delivered. What would Avraham's prayer achieve, other than – possibly – frustration? If prayer is futile, should one bother praying? Furthermore, the Torah provides the reason that Hashem informed Avraham of Sodom's bleak future: "And Avraham will surely become a great and mighty nation." What does that have to do with it? Why is Avraham's prayer contingent upon his status as progenitor of *Klal Yisrael*?

The *Belzer Rebbe* explains that, when a Jew prays to Hashem during times of travail, even if it appears that his *tefillah* has gone unanswered, it does not mean that Hashem did not listen. Hashem listens quite well and, while He might not apply the prayer to this person, it will nonetheless be saved, so that it yields results for someone else in need. It might be the petitioner himself at a later date, a member of his family, or someone else altogether unrelated – but it will be used.

We now understand why Hashem revealed to Avraham ahead of time that He was going to annihilate the city of Sodom. He wanted Avraham to pray, to extend himself, to exert the effort, to seek their salvation in the merit of ten *tzaddikim*. Unfortunately, the requisite number was not to be found. The *tefillah*, however, was shelved for a later opportunity, when it could be used to help someone in need. Furthermore, we now see the significance of Avraham becoming a large nation. His *tefillah* was not in vain. When necessary, his descendants could avail themselves of their Patriarch's prayers.

The **Steipler Gaon, zl**, once said, "Do not be dismayed. There is no such thing as a sincere prayer

that goes unanswered. Any heartfelt request addressed to G-d must be answered. It cannot be otherwise. If it is not answered today, it will be answered tomorrow. If not tomorrow, it will be answered in a week. If not in a week, in a month. If not answered in a month, it may be answered in a year, or in ten years, or in one hundred years – or more. If your prayers are not answered in your lifetime, they will be answered for your children or for your children's children. We cannot say for sure when a prayer will be answered, but we can rest assured that every prayer will be answered somehow, someday."

Veritably, Avraham Avinu's *tefillah* did have an incredible effect. **Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl**, of Lublin, teaches that the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech* was "trapped" in Sodom, concealed within Lot. Hashem had Avraham pray for the people of Sodom, even though their fate had already been sealed due to their overwhelming iniquity. Why was it necessary for the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech* to emerge from Lot via his daughters? One would think that such a pure, holy *neshamah* would have been the product of the holy union of *tzaddikim*. The **Sifsei Kohen** (commentary to *Parashas Vayeishev*) explains that, when a magnificent, holy *neshamah* is about to descend from Heaven Above, a vehement objection arises in the Heavenly kingdom. Why permit such a lofty soul to enter this world? Thus, in order to deceive and mislead these adversaries, Hashem is "compelled" to dispatch this *neshamah* in a roundabout manner. It appears from a place from which these adversaries would never imagine that it could come.

Had Avraham prayed specifically for the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech*, all of the opposing forces would have rallied to prevent the efficacy of this prayer from being realized. Somehow, they would have made sure that David's *neshamah* remain concealed forever in Sodom. Therefore, by informing Avraham of Sodom's upcoming predicament, Hashem knew that Avraham would pray for them. The opposing forces saw that Hashem did not apply Avraham's *tefillos* on behalf of Sodom. They had no reason to believe that those *tefillos* would be transferred to David, so that his *neshamah* could see light in a world expunged of the evil perpetrated by Sodom. His birth would set the process for our eventual redemption, heralded by *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.

We have no shortage of stories to demonstrate how Hashem saves every single sincere *tefillah* that emanates from the mouths of those who petition Him. I was especially moved by the following vignette.

A bitter, unhappy woman came to the *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, **Horav Aryeh Levine, zl**, and requested, "Let me sit in your house, so that I may cry and weep before you." The *tzaddik* responded, "You may surely sit; you may surely cry and weep, but only if you direct your tears to Hashem. He listens to the weeping of His children."

The woman took a seat and began to lament about her husband's condition. He was in the hospital, mortally ill, waiting to die. Rav Aryeh pleaded with her, "Do not cry so; Hashem will surely have mercy and grant your husband a cure." Alas, her husband's *neshamah*, soul, returned to its Source a few days later. Rav Aryeh did all he could to comfort this woman, but she remained

inconsolable. Finally, she calmed down enough to say, “I will accept your solace and stop my expression of grief – but only if you tell me what became of the thousands of tears that I shed for my husband. I recited pages and pages of *Tehillim*; I prayed every waking minute of the day, imploring Hashem to let my husband live. What happened to all of the prayers, to all of the tears?”

“Let me tell you,” *Rav Aryeh* began. “When your life on this world comes to an end, you will come before the Heavenly Tribunal and discover how many severe and harsh decrees against the Jewish People have been torn up, extirpated, annulled, all because of the precious tears which you shed on behalf of your husband. Not one teardrop goes to waste. The Holy One counts each one like pearls, treasuring them, saving them for a later time when they will be put to use.”

As soon as *Rav Aryeh* concluded his words, the woman immediately burst into tears – again. Only this time they were tears of happiness, because now she knew that her tears had not been in vain. A while later, she returned to *Rav Aryeh*’s home and asked the *Rav*, “*Rebbe*, please tell me again those beautiful words. What happened to those tears of mine that I wept?”